

US Foreign Policy Is For Sale: Our Indian Friends Should Be Buying

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On 26 June, Donald Trump and Narendra Modi will meet in Washington. While the two have spoken at least three times since Trump's election, this will be their first meeting. Many Hindu nationalists in India and the United States supported Donald Trump's candidacy, at least in part, because they applauded his anti-Muslim campaign rhetoric and hoped that, if elected, he would adopt harsher policies towards Pakistan and other Muslim states supporting or exporting Islamist violence.

For Hindu nationalists, Trump seemed like an obvious partner for Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party, which has sustained criticism at home and abroad for its divisive rhetoric on Muslims.

In addition, both men are populist leaders who capitalised upon the simmering discontent of their restive millennial voters who clamoured for political change, and both men have made grandiose promises to grow their countries' economies and make their countries great. However, the expected bromance is not in evidence. Why?

First, on the campaign trail and since taking office, Trump has barked a consistent anti-immigrant message and has claimed immigrants are

“taking American jobs.” (In fact, robots are taking away those American jobs.) This week, he signed an executive order rendering it more difficult for Indians to obtain lucrative H-1 visas for tech jobs in the United States.

Second, Trump’s anti-Muslim vitriol has given a fillip to America’s undiscerning racists who have assaulted non-Muslims of Indian-heritage because they mistook them for Muslims.

Third, despite campaign commitments to push China hard, since becoming President he has actually prioritised better ties with China. This is a serious reversal of US policies under George W Bush and Barack Obama, who believed India was an important partner with which China’s troublesome rise could be managed. More recently, Trump derisively suggested that India’s commitment to the Paris Accord was because of financial perquisites rather than a desire to decelerate the pace of global climate change.

Worse yet, Trump’s government is in disarray with hundreds of appointments vacant nearly five months into his first term. Despite media commentary to the contrary, this is not due to incompetence; rather it is a deliberate step to fulfill what Steve Bannon described as an intention to “deconstruct the administrative state.” Trump has not appointed an ambassador to India and the Departments of Defense and State are lacking assistant secretaries and deputy assistant secretaries, the levels at which planning for such bilateral meetings typically take place.

What can be expected from this meeting given that the traditional persons who would be tasked with developing a vision and a strategy are absent?

Most commentators expect that the two will focus upon terrorism, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Most commentators agree that Modi is unlikely to bring up the issue of H-1 visas or Paris because Modi knows the administration's opinion. Most realistically, Modi will use this an opportunity to get to know Trump and win him over personally. The world knows that Trump is notoriously unpredictable and impulsive. Presuming Trump manages to not undermine a relationship that multiple governments in Delhi and Washington have worked hard to forge, here are some forward looking initiatives that Modi may consider. After all, both men are known – rightly or wrongly – for their business acumen.

Also Read: [How Will Trump's Withdrawal From The Paris Accord Affect India?](#)

- For Hindu nationalists, Trump seemed like an obvious partner for Modi and the BJP but the expected bromance is not in evidence.
- The USA is for sale and rather than its enemies, friends like India should be allowed a piece too.
- Tata could give a fillip to America's dwindling coal industry.
- India is pioneering affordable renewable energy sources, so why can't Tata Power bring these projects to the US?
- Indian investors could commit to developing an important burgeoning industry of urban hydroponic farming.

America Is For Sale: India Should Be Able to Buy A Piece Too

As the world has come to appreciate, America is up for sale.

(Unfortunately, many Americans have not come to this conclusion.)

Trump has ensconced his children and son-in-law in positions of power in a display of breathtaking nepotism. Trump declined to put his assets in a blind trust to align with the domestic and foreign emoluments clauses of the US Constitution and has chosen to remain

nested in myriad conflicts of interests. He and his family have taken advantage of his occupation of the White House to further enrich their family fortunes. He entertains foreign dignitaries at his personal properties such as Mar-a-Lago (which he dubbed the “southern White House”), which has doubled its membership fees to \$200,000.

Foreign dignitaries feel obliged to stay at the Trump Hotel when visiting Washington and Trump, contrary to promises made, has not “donated” those proceeds to the US Treasury.

His daughter Ivanka Trump raised eyebrows when she accompanied her father to Japan and tried to broker side deals for her company, while having an official role in the White House. Trump’s spokesperson Kellyanne Conway violated ethics rules when she used her official capacity to encourage Americans to buy Ms Trump’s product line, which had come under duress from boycotts.

Evidence continues to mount that Russian interference in our elections was more extensive than previously believed with some 39 state election systems under attack. Republican insouciance seems to be partially explained by the fact that they are as culpable as anyone, with high-level Republicans taking millions of dollars from Russia for their campaigns.

It’s hard not to conclude that the United States is for sale. At a minimum, our friends – rather than our enemies like China and Russia – should be allowed to purchase a piece of the fun.

Also Read: [Trumpexit Could Be Good News for India as Modi Meets Macron](#)

How Can India Get a Space at the Trough?

Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner attracted scrutiny recently when his sister was in Beijing in early May telling potential property investors that they can essentially purchase American citizenship.

Why can't Indian investors purchase citizenship?

Here are some ideas for Indian investors that capitalise on US needs and Indian know-how. Given that Trump likes to say he understands the art of the deal, there are deals to be made with India that can create jobs for both countries. Below is a selection of "out of the box" ideas that can be a win-win for our two countries.

First, let's discuss coal. America's coal industry is flagging. While Indian investment in coal projects has stalled, India is still heavily dependent upon coal. Tata is one of the world's most expansive movers of coal.

Tata could give a fillip to America's dwindling coal industry.

This is not a long-term fix, but it could provide a needed breather while American policy makers try and grapple with what to do with coal miners whose jobs are becoming as relevant as wheelwrights were in 1959.

Second, India is pioneering affordable renewable energy sources.

India has learned the value of micro-hydel projects. Tata Power is just one of the firms taking the lead in this area.

Why can't Tata Power bring these projects to the United States?

In many of the areas where coal mining takes place, mountainous streams may well be suitable places for these projects. Families can become renewable energy farmers rather than coal miners.

India has faced strong incentives to make renewable energy affordable and efficient. The United States could learn much from India and, in the process, create a new source of jobs. Many of India's technologies have the virtue of being easy to use and service, which may be an additional plus in America's rusted-out coal belt.

Third, let's think big. America's inner cities have "food deserts," because they lack access to affordable food. Some cities such as Detroit have large swathes of buildings that are in complete states of disrepair.

Agriculture has long been a source of US-Indian collaboration.

Would it be crazy to suggest that Indian investors could commit to developing an important burgeoning industry of urban hydroponic farming?

This involves acquiring and converting a dilapidated building into floors of hydroponic farming. This has the advantage of creating year-round produce which can be sold locally, thus decreasing the carbon footprint of transporting fruits and vegetables and doing much to mitigate the "food deserts" in American cities. This has been shown to be an effective way of supplying high-quality food while also staving off the urban flight of collapsing cities.

Also Read: [The Modi-Macron Meet: Different Strokes, But Common Threads](#)



What could the Trump family do for India? From left to right: Jared Kushner, Tiffany Trump, Melania Trump, Donald Trump, Ivanka Trump, Eric Trump and Lara Trump. (Photo Courtesy: Instagram/[Ivanka Trump](#))

As Americans are becoming more aware of the ecological costs of driving larger cars, Americans are looking for increasingly cost effective ways of commuting. Again, India has led the way. While General Motors' efforts to break into the Indian market may have been

unspectacular, why can't India break into the American car market? Is there any reason why General Motors – for example – can't partner up with Tata to bring more competition to the ultra-compact car market in the United States? The model would be no different than, say, Toyota which assembles many cars in the United States and even produces key components here.

What could the Trump family do for India, especially if no one has any expectations that any of them will shed their myriad conflicts of interests? A lot actually. Trump doesn't actually build things, as is well known.

However, the Trump and Kushner combine could help build Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh' brand new capital which promises to be a planned, smart city.

Ivanka Trump needs places to produce her leather handbags, shoes and clothing line. Why should China get all of the fun? Surely India could negotiate a plum deal to manufacture these products?

Let's really be creative. Given the sky-rocketing cost of health care in the United States which promises to become more so if Trump successfully rolls back Obamacare, India's burgeoning "medical resorts" may provide welcome options for persons who need life-saving surgery or face-saving cosmetic procedures. Again, the Trump and Kushner combine could invest in new projects or brand extant ones.

Finally, India was a path-blazer in electronic voting machines. As the United States' hacking-prone electronic voting systems are demonstrably unworthy of the world's oldest democracies, perhaps the

world's largest democracy can share some technology, machinery and knowhow on how to conduct reliable, hack-proof elections. If India could make this offer, I for one would be very grateful.

Also Read: [India's China Policy: Face the Dragon with Self-Confidence](#)

It's a Wrap

America is most certainly for sale whether it's the Russians purchasing our elections or industrial-strength graft being facilitated by the White House. If we are going to be for sale, I'd like to think that friends like India – rather than foes like Saudi Arabia, China and Russia – would be allowed to buy a slice of the pie.

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